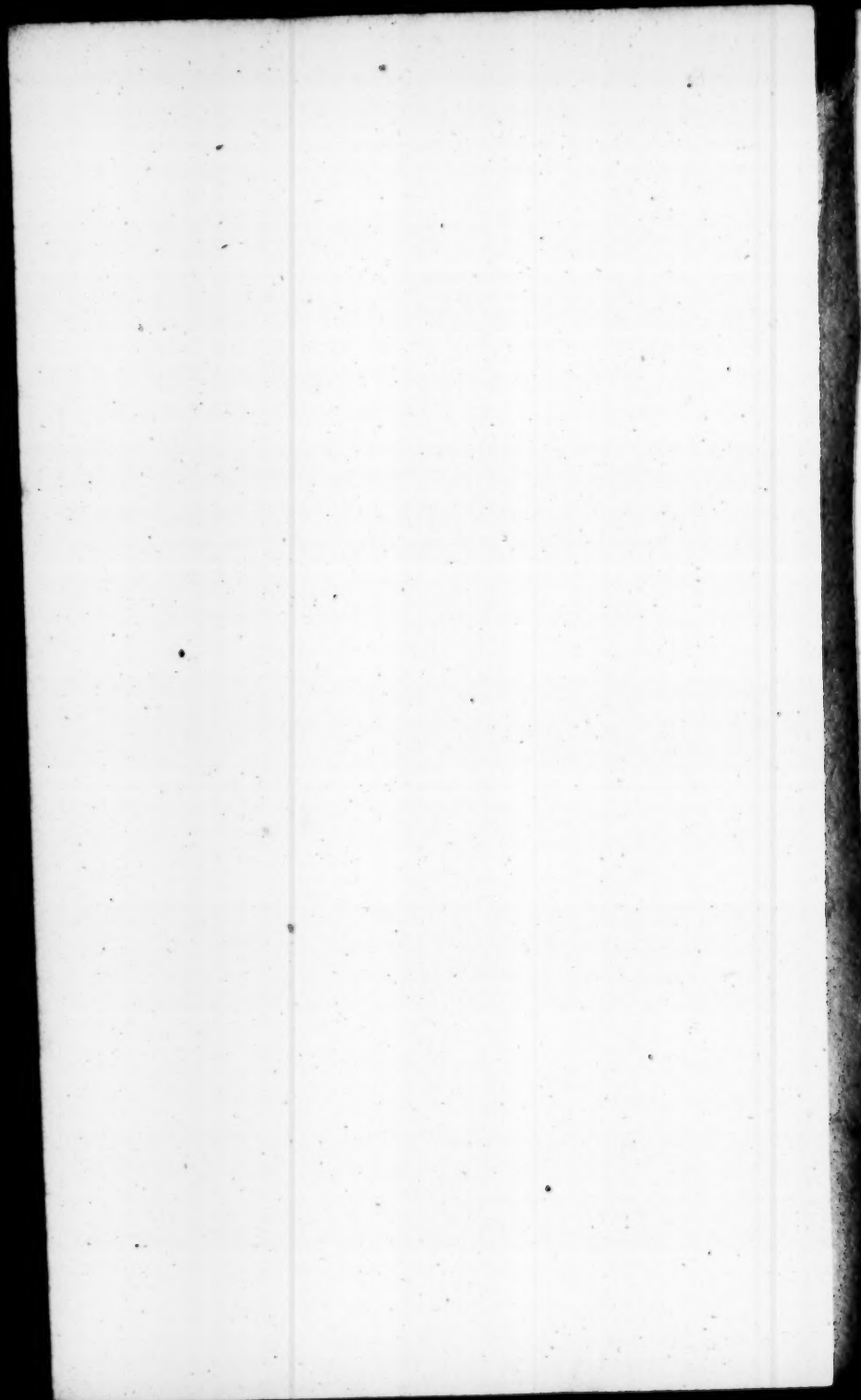

VANCENZA;

OR THE

DANGERS OF CREDULITY,

A MORAL TALE.

VOLUME II.



VANCENZA;

OR, THE

DANGERS OF CREDULITY;

A MORAL TALE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. M. ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF THE POEMS OF

LAURA MARIA, AINSI VA LA MONDE, a MONODY
to the MEMORY of SIR J. REYNOLDS, &c. &c.

“Be wary then: best SAFETY lies in FEAR.”

SHAKSPERE.

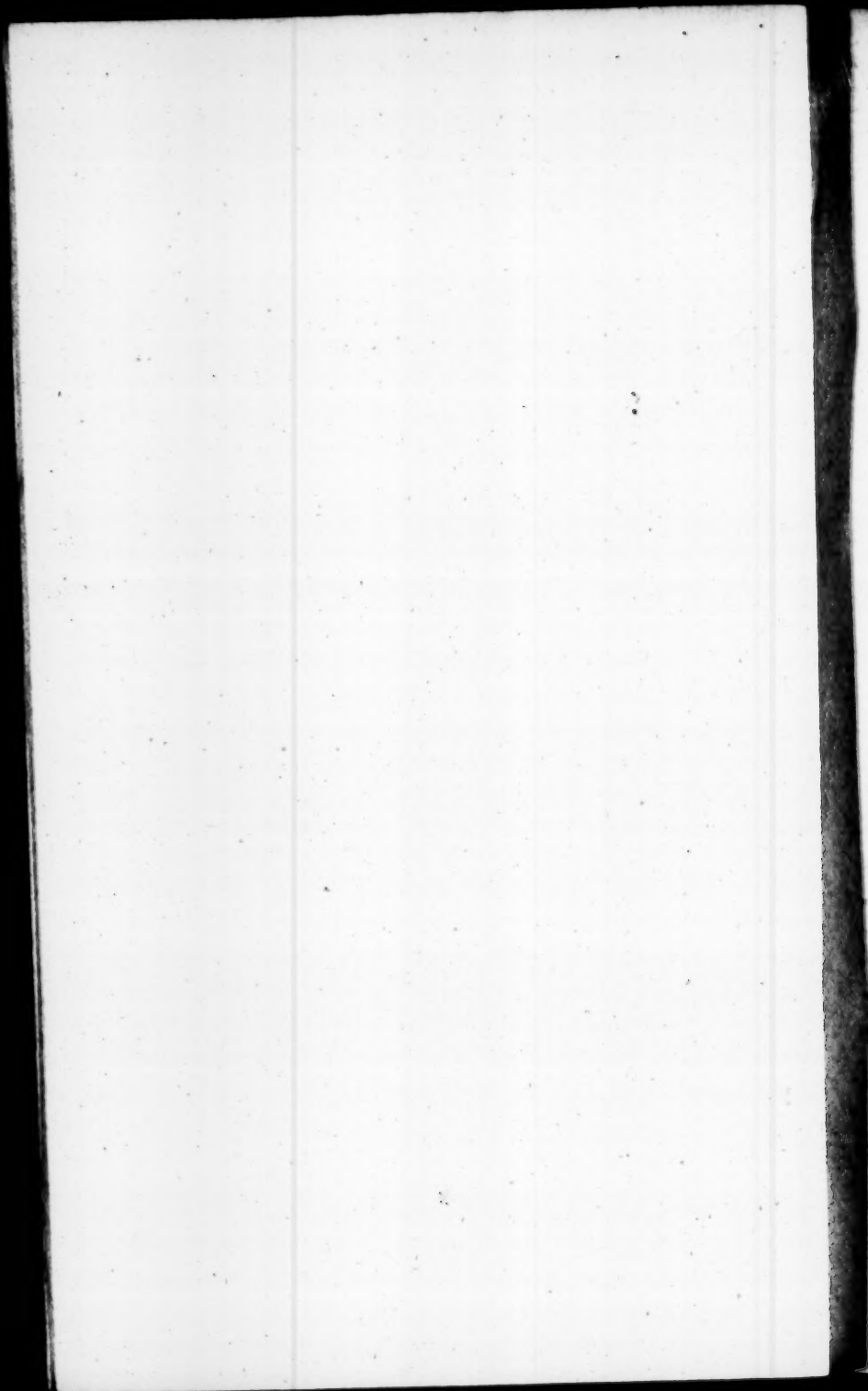
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M DCC XCIII.



VANCENZA.

CHAPTER I.

WINTER was now far advanced ; the bleak winds swept the bare summit of the precipice ; the veil of foliage, torn from Nature's variegated bosom, was scattered by the blast, and the deep valley presented to the solitary moralist, a desolated blank of universal whiteness ; every shallow rivulet, that had meandered over its pebbly channel, was bound in icy fetters, its wanderings arrested, and its lucid current congealed in melancholy silence. The feathered choir, no longer attuning their downy throats to strains of melody, sat moping on the leafless branches, or pecking the wild berries, spared by the ravages of unpropitious skies, as

the scanty pittance of Nature's little commoners. Here and there, upon the snow-encrusted earth, a plummy victim found a spotless grave! The wanton squirrel, now crouched, almost famished, in the hollow of an aged tree, upon whose plenteous boughs, he lately fed, 'till the appetite was sated with the luxurious banquet. The beasts of the forest were prowling for prey; every thing rapacious, and nothing satisfied.

The last tribute of affection being paid to the remains of the departed Count Vancenza, the lovely and disconsolate mourners prepared for their journey to the forest. They ardently wished to bury their sorrows in retirement, yet dreaded the agonies which the recollection of former joys would inevitably occa-

sion. They well know how much his society had contributed towards their happiness ; that his vivacity and good-humour had harmonised their little parties, and shed eternal sun-shine on their wintry days, which, deprived of their only charm, would now appear tedious and irksome. They considered themselves as newly-created beings, cast upon the rocks and quicksands of a tempestuous world, without a pilot to guide them to the harbour of repose.

The change of pecuniary circumstances, and the necessary retrenchment of their splendid establishment, would have affected minds less exalted than theirs ; but they knew how to despise the tinsel enjoyments of grandeur, and to cherish, with gratitude to Heaven, the conscious and

sober gratifications of rectitude and virtue.

The Duke del Vero flattered himself, that, by the death of the Count, he should have a complete triumph over the beauteous and unfriended Orphan. He only waited till decency permitted them to receive visits of condolence, for the commencement of his attacks. He wrote a letter, by way of passport, to the Marchioness de Vallorie, wherein he lamented, in the most pathetic language, the loss they had sustained, at the same time requesting her permission to pay his personal respects.

The Marchioness, who firmly believed that the Duke was seriously and honourably attached to Elvira, looked forward, with the most pleas-

ing hope of her forming a splendid and permanent alliance; she considered this prospect as most singularly consoling, at a moment when Elvira was exposed to all the mortifications——

“ Which virtue, sunk to poverty, would meet
 “ From giddy passion and low-minded pride.”

The Prince Almanza, whose sincere affection for Elvira was awakened by the tender touch of sympathetic pity, endeavoured repeatedly to gain admittance into the abode of anguish; his visits were daily returned by written acknowledgements, and, at the expiration of three weeks, they departed, taking a final leave of Madrid, and all its fatal haunts of destructive dissipation.

They measured back the same route which they had pursued in the journey to Madrid ; but how changed, how melancholy, did every object appear ! The faint traces of former scenes, brought to mind the superlative delight they had experienced in the edifying conversation, and under the protection of their more than parent. All his endearing virtues, his superior qualifications, shone with redoubled lustre to the glistening eye of tender recollection. We never knew how to value sufficiently a beloved friend, until fate has for ever deprived us of the blessing we enjoyed ; we then look back upon the imperfections of human nature with an indulgent and dispassionate eye, while every excellent qualification presses upon the memory, adorned with new and re-

fulgent splendour: it is a consoling reflection, that those trivial *errors* into which the wisest are sometimes betrayed, are seldom long remembered after we are gone; while our *virtues* make a lasting impression, even upon the minds of those who refused the tribute of applause when they were exercised in their fullest vigour.

A variety of invitations had been sent to the Marchioness de Vallorie, and her family, by the gay and volatile part of their acquaintance, previous to their departure, under the absurd and common idea of dispersing the clouds of despondency, by the broad glare of brilliant dissipation. That the sable trappings of wo too often cover the heart divested of every exquisite feeling, is cer-

tain ; but the truly delicate and sensible mind depends not upon the mere semblance of affliction : the dingy shade of a garment can neither add to or diminish the sensations of dear and unfading regret : heartfelt and unaffected grief turns with disgust from the hackneyed display of ostentatious sorrow, whilst it enjoys a secret luxury which the hardened and unfeeling mind can never experience !

The first day's journey presented nothing but a dreary waste of desolated nature. The valleys were rendered nearly impassable by the vast heaps of snow, drifted by the whirling winds from the adjacent mountains. The intense cold scarcely permitted the domestics to guide the mules, that, toiling with tardy pace

along the deep tracks of other carriages, rendered the tedious moments almost insupportable.

They arrived in the evening at a small and miserable post-house, six leagues from Madrid : the shades of night approaching, they deemed it imprudent and unsafe to venture across the mountains which terminate Old Castile, rather choosing to take up their abode in an inconvenient hovel, than risk the dangers of losing themselves in the snow, or perishing by the inclemency of the season.

A gloomy silence prevailed during the day ; in vain did the eye of memory endeavour to retrace the embowering shades of myrtle, the avenues of citron and pomegranate,

the sun-burnt swains, and merry lasses, dancing before the splendid cavalcade. In vain did the ear of fancy listen for their uncouth songs, and tinkling mandolins ; the woodland melodies, and the soft murmurs of the rippling streams ; the hills, that almost seemed to move, by the wavings of their woody canopies when fanned by the summer breezes, now hid their bare and cheerless summits in the fleecy clouds. Every little cottage that reared its modest roof along the forest was covered with snow ; and all the triumphs of Nature seemed overwhelmed in universal sadness.

At length they reached the humble asylum, where the weary traveller finds a shelter, and the voluptuary a lesson of humility ! The coarse and

simple fare the season afforded, was spread before them: but they had fed on sorrow, till the heartsickened!

They declined taking any refreshment, save that which fatigue allowed them in broken slumbers, and which the exhausted frame sometimes enjoys even under the severe attacks of throbbing pain, or the more excruciating miseries of mental agony.

CHAPTER II.

THE faint dawn cast its grey mantle over the dreary prospect, when they commenced their second day's journey. The Marchioness de Val-lorie was silently sorrowful, while the young mourners hid their tears beneath their veils, and indulged in all the wailing accents of regret. By noon they reached the foot of a stupendous mountain, over which they were obliged to pass: the weary mules began to mount the toilsome ascent, every moment endangering the lives of the travellers, by falling on the rugged pathway. By painful

and repeated exertions, they arrived at a small hovel, about half-way up the mountain, where an old shepherd presented them dried fruits, and wine of the poorest quality. They readily partook of his coarse fare, and, after gratefully requiting him, proceeded.

After surmounting innumerable impediments, they reached the summit, and stopping their mules to rest, they observed a venerable man——“clad in a pilgrim’s weeds.” His staff supported his feeble limbs, and his scrip seemed scantily supplied. His countenance was the picture of meek sufferance; his white hair hung like threads of silver upon his stooping shoulders, except when the rude blast compelled it to shade his wrinkled cheek. His hat was worn

and tattered ; the scallop-shell placed in the front, as the badge of penitential humility. He resembled the withered oak, majestic even in ruin ! He raised his eyes, which meditation had bent towards the ground ;—he bowed respectfully ; then, crossing his aching breast, pursued his weary way in pensive sorrow !

Elvira, lifting up her veil with eager solicitude, exclaimed, “ Poor Pilgrim ! thou art journeying through a vale of misery, unnoticed and unfriended : if there is a heart hard enough to pass by thee, without bestowing the tribute of a sigh, may it experience thy pangs, without thy resignation ! ”

He was shortly overtaken by the travellers ; they ordered their do-

mestics to stop the mules, and, in the language the feeling heart never fails to dictate to the tongue, when it addresses the unhappy, they politely requested to be informed, whether they could be of service to him, or render the progress of his journey less irksome by society. "My servant," said the Marchioness, "can seat himself behind the carriage, during the remainder of this post, perhaps his mule will be of use to you." "Madam," replied the venerable man, "I am bound to bless you for your generous attention; but, alas! I cannot profit by your kindness: the humiliation of penitential misery does not aspire to taste the balm of comfort; I am grown familiar with affliction, and should scarcely be able to endure a cessation of my sorrows: I have no

friend to lament my absence, no kindred to mourn for my disgrace ; the warm passions of earlier days are settled in the frost of age ; penury has long since denied the enjoyments of life, and eternal penitence alone can expiate its errors." Here he turned aside, to wipe away the involuntary tear, wrung from his bursting heart by the hard grasp of unrelenting conscience, then requesting their pardon for having detained them so long, poured out his soul in fervent benedictions, and rested on his staff: they passed, and soon lost sight of him by the winding of the road.

Elvira's speaking eye paid the tribute of sensibility to the pilgrim's artless narrative. " Is it possible," said she, " that a single crime should

harbour its dark purpose in a mind that appears so exquisitely enlightened? Can a countenance so marked with complacency and candour, prove the specious mask to cover a base designing heart?—Impossible!—I am certain this hopeless penitent is less criminal than his own scrupulous severity will suffer him to believe. The austerity with which he condemns himself is the strongest proof that his crime is venial; for the practice of hardened and abandoned villany never fails to steel the soul against compunction.—I wish I could learn the story, and participate the sufferings of this poor old man: age, assailed by poverty, and toiling towards the grave, requires the hand of kind commiseration to pluck the thorns that choke its dreary path-way!—Let us endeavour to

lighten the burthen of affliction by the gentle offices of humanity ?”

The Marchioness instantly suggested the idea of inviting the Pilgrim to rest at Vancenza. “There,” said she, “perhaps he will unlock the secrets of his heart ; but I absolutely forbid that any means should be adopted to draw from his wrung bosom a confession that may wound his feelings.” They promised to observe the strictest delicacy, and in hopes of his arrival, stopped at the bottom of the mountain.

He soon came up with them ; the Marchioness, whose mind wanted little preparation for the exercise of gentleness and pity, informed the Pilgrim, that if his route lay towards the Forest of Vancenza, he would

confer a pleasure on them by sojourning a few days at the castle.—He thanked them, and promised to accept their hospitable invitation; though his stay, he said, must be circumscribed to a few hours only.

The severity of the weather rendering their road tedious and difficult, the second evening terminated in accomplishing only half their journey.

Nothing interesting occurred the following day. On the fourth, the melancholy party reached the gloomy mansion of domestic sorrow.

CHAPTER III.

IT was midnight when they arrived at Vancenza ; the old porter opened the pondrous gate, that closed the outward walls, in sullen silence. At the inner door the steward, in the deepest mourning, greeted their return, with a profound sigh. The ancient apartments appeared cold and dreary, stripped of every attraction. The table was prepared for supper ; but *he*, whose engaging conversation once enlivened every repast, was there no longer.

Elvira's heart throbbed with agony ; she trembled lest her eye

should meet the Marchioness's ; Caroline hid her face upon her folded arms on the corner of the table, and an awful silence prevailed throughout the apartment.

After the servants had waited for some minutes in dumb affliction, the Marchioness informed them they might withdraw. Elvira drew her chair towards the fire ; her companions soon followed her. Every breast was bursting with anguish ; every eye suffused with tears.

The Marchioness broke the melancholy silence :——

“ We are now, my lovely girls,” said she, “ deprived of our only comfort, our only protector. I need not picture to you the dangers and

calamities to which our sex are exposed, or the extreme caution necessary to be observed by young persons entering into the tempestuous scenes of transitory life. The various examples you have witnessed of the depravity of human nature, during your residence at Madrid, must be indelibly imprinted on your minds. The sordid duplicity of one sex, and the disgusting insignificance of the other, form a striking contrasted portrait, wherein you may trace the lineaments of half mankind. The virtuous retirement in which you were educated, under the careful inspection of my lamented brother, almost taught you to believe that perfection belonged to the human heart—Experience has convinced you of the contrary.

“ The mind of man is a mixture of incomprehensible propensities—virtue is often its natural inmate ; but, there is scarcely an instance wherein either vanity, avarice, ambition, inordinate passions, or frivolous pursuits, do not, in some degree, contaminate its purity, and tarnish its most brilliant attributes.

“ In youth the warmth of a vigorous imagination leads the giddy mortal through the flowery paths of prodigality, ’till dissipation plunges him in a gulph of hopeless misery. In vain does the sinking victim, struggling in the whirlpool of destruction, supplicate the commiserating hand of friendship, to snatch him from the torrent that overwhelms him ; he that falls by his own imprudence, falls unpitied ; for age forgets the errors of

its earlier years, and avarice deadens the soul to every exquisite sensation of philanthropy. The miser shrinking under the gripe of misery, craving for *that*, which in fact he possesses, without knowing how to enjoy, shivers in voluntary anguish over masses of treasure, and possessing the means of every gratification, pines out an irksome existence in poverty and sorrow, till he sinks into the grave, abhorred and unlamented! The pretended philosopher pompously instructs the afflicted with his specious theory, and affects to condemn the repining spirit that meets the frowns of fortune with an unwelcome eye. Let the hand of Heaven deprive him of its smallest blessing, he falls beneath the stroke, and becomes the victim of despair! The atheist, vauntingly profane, revel-

ling in the plentitude of health, and basking in the sunny splendours of prosperity, laughs to scorn the devout enthusiast; behold him on the bed of death, shook by convulsive agonies; he renounces his former temerity, and his last sigh is an appeal to his Creator!

“ Let the eye of reason take an accurate survey of the general pursuits of mankind, and their pernicious tendencies. The father, whole years scraping together the means of gratifying the short-lived prodigality of the son; the fond mother, adorning the darling of her heart with all the graces of education, and embellishing her form with every tasteful and becoming appendage—perhaps—to fascinate the eye of some artful seducer, whose spells shall tar-

nish her fair fame, and bend her beauties to an untimely sepulchre. The lover, ardently pursuing the coquette that abhors him, while the fond bosom that throbs with affection is suffered to languish in obscurity, deserted and forgotten.

“ Little and contracted minds are apt to envy the possessors of exalted titles and empty distinctions. IGNORANCE only descends to bestow admiration upon the *gew-gaw* appendages of what is commonly called RANK ; it fancies it beholds a thousand dazzling graces, dignifying and embellishing the varnished front of artificial consequence. To the abject sycophant, who eats the bread of miserable obedience, poisoned by the breath of adulation, the *baubles* of greatness are objects of venera-

tion ; the imbecility of childhood is amused with every toy :—but the ENLIGHTENED MIND thinks for *itself* ; explores the precepts of uncontaminated *truth* ; weighs, in the even scale of unbiassed judgment, the rights and claims of *intellectual pre-eminence* : exults in the attributes of *reason* ; and opposes, with dauntless intrepidity, every innovation that dares assail even the *least* of its prerogatives. The shield of *heraldry* is frequently placed before the heart that has no *other* to defend it ;—but VIRTUE disdains the recreant subterfuge, and lifts its brow above the venal herd—bare, but undefiled by the contagious trappings of privileged iniquity ! The HEART of MAN is his natural dominion ;—his *passions* are his *subjects* ; and he who

best knows how to govern them deserves the admiration of his contemporaries, and claims the *only* pre-eminence HUMANITY *ought to be* proud of. The parade of ostentatious pride, and the lavish distribution of ill-bestowed riches, cannot fail to provoke the indignation of discerning and unprejudiced observers. Wealth, profusely squandered in selfish and unworthy gratifications, serves only as the degraded means of blazoning the depravity of its possessors, while the heart, that generously participates the scanty pittance of fortune with the unhappy ; that calls forth the buds of genius, frost-nipped by the biting blasts of poverty ; that shelters modest merit from the taunts of overbearing ignorance ; presents a

sublime picture of that perfection, which exalts mankind in the likeness of *divinity*.

“ The poorest peasant, fatigued with the exertions of laborious exercise, enjoys the balmy influence of sleep upon the rushy pillow of honest indigence ; while the downy couch sustains the pampered frame, restless, and a prey to feverish inquietude : thus the hind may smile contemptuously on the boasted superiority of his lord ; and, in the full enjoyment of repose and health, look down with pity on the imbecility of mind and body, the wretched associate of luxury and indolence. So capricious are the fluctuations of fortune, and so uncertain the decrees of fate, that we scarcely know what may be termed *real* happiness. The

insolent triumphs of vice over virtue, the misfortunes frequently pursuing the efforts of honest industry, while profusion overflows the lap of infamy, ought to convince us, that some undefinable cause actuates every principle of the grand system by which the soul is governed ; and that some beneficial end is the object of those unaccountable events, which we presume to repine at, and to misname the injustice of Providence.

“ If reflection takes a flattering retrospect of the empty round of fancied pleasures, you sometimes participated at Madrid ; and if the present prospect of retirement should appear irksome by the delusive comparison, let reason whisper, that if you are not revelling in the lively

scenes of brilliant splendour, you are at least secure from the dangers, and exempt from the miseries, of public life. With this consolatory idea, I trust you will submit, without repining, to the sober comforts of seclusion, and, in the laudable pursuits of mental cultivation, forget the tinsel blandishments of fashionable folly."

Elvira, whose opinions exactly corresponded with those of the Marchioness, readily acknowledged the truth and propriety of her admonitions. She rose, and embraced her affectionate monitress: "I shall never be able sufficiently to repay your goodness," said Elvira—"but your lessons shall be engraved upon my heart; and every action of my

life shall be guided by your counsels."

Carline made no reply ; and the excellent preceptress, after a short pause, resumed her discourse.

" As we have some months to remain under this beloved roof, there will be time sufficient to arrange our plans of future conduct with prudence and circumspection. I am still mistress of a small villa in the vicinity of Naples ; it was the favourite retreat of my most honoured husband ; the delight he enjoyed in forming and embellishing the sweet Elysium, prevented my ever parting with it. Here, at least, my beloved companions, we may hope for uninterrupted tranquillity ; eco-

mony will enable us to live comfortably, if not splendidly:—we are accustomed to retirement, and have lately seen enough of the world to despise its follies.”

“ My dear Marchioness,” said Elvira——“ I am much richer than you imagine ; I am possessed of many very valuable baubles, the liberal marks of your brother’s indulgence. I received them from his hands as pledges of his affection ;—I proudly wore them as proofs of his generosity ! They would now, alas ! be ill suited to my prospects and condition ; I now consider myself as an ORPHAN ; I will not say friendless, while you exist ; you must allow me to dispose of them ; they will make some addition to our little fortune,

and I cannot consent to become a burthen to you, unless you will agree to the proposal."

"NEVER," replied the Marchioness, while her eyes sparkled through tears of admiration and tenderness, "*Never*, my dear child, shall you part with those trifles, bestowed upon you by your respected guardian. They must be held sacred : but your magnanimity of soul darts forth with new lustre, whenever an occasion presents itself ; I admire the exquisite refinement of your feelings, and the only unpleasant task I shall ever impose upon them, is that of an implicit *silence* upon this subject for the future."

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Deeply impressed with this conversation, the young pupils retired to rest; and the amiable Marchioness to her accustomed devotions.

CHAPTER IV.

ELVIRA soon quitted her pillow, and wandering through the gothic apartments of the castle, explored every corner, and tried every lock, in hopes of discovering that, which might receive the last gift of her lamented guardian. In vain did she search, in vain endeavour to find any clue to the perplexing mystery. A thousand hopes and fears by turns assailed her bosom ; ingenuity could not devise any probable means of developing the secret attached to the legacy bequeathed with such tender emotion, and curiosity would not suffer her to rest satisfied in her present state of uncertainty.

The whole morning was dedicated to useless endeavours, except a few moments of sympathetic sorrow over the crystal tablet, whose mournful lines were imprinted upon her heart. That some sad history was enveloped in the oblivious shroud of time, there remained not a single doubt; and her prophetic soul informed her, that *she* alone must unveil the fatal secret.

The arrival of the Pilgrim put an end to that day's search. The steward had conducted him to his apartment, whither the Marchioness and her pupils instantly repaired to bid him welcome. A variety of refreshments were placed before him, but he declined the proffered luxuries. The scanty nourishment his scrip afforded, being nearly exhausted, he replenished it with thanks, and draw-

ing a wicker chair to the corner of the spacious hearth, blessed Heaven—and smiled contented! “Are you going much farther?” said Carline; the Marchioness shook her head as a mark of disapprobation. “Yes, fair lady,” replied the Pilgrim, “I am going to pay my devotions at the Chapel of the Loretto.”—Carline’s curiosity, arrested by her mother’s frown, waited impatiently for further information.

“If my melancholy story,” resumed he, “could either instruct or amuse you, I would gladly recite it! but, alas! uninterrupted we will only awaken your pity, without repaying your lost time.” Elvira assured him, that to alleviate his grief would be to them the proudest gratification; and that if sympathy could

administer comfort to the wounds of misfortune, he might depend upon receiving some degree of consolation in communicating his calamities.

“ Sweet ladies,” said the venerable man, “ I shall but tire your patience: but if it is your wish to hear a tale of sorrow, I feel, that gratitude and respect demand it of me.” The Marchioness would readily have excused him, but her inclinations were over-ruled by Carline and Elvira, who, seating themselves on each side of the Pilgrim, with anxious curiosity awaited the recital.

THE PILGRIM'S STORY.

“ My eyes first opened to the vicissitudes of life, in the city of Avignon. My father was a General in

the French service ; and, my mother the only offspring of her noble, but indigent parents. They were united by disinterested affection, and as their happiness centered in each other, they were above the envy, or the malice of mankind. My father's fortune, though not competent to procure the luxuries of the world, was, by my mother's economy and exemplary prudence, sufficient for the enjoyment of every comfort.

“ I was the only fruit of their unsullied attachment. My amiable mother survived but a few minutes after she gave me being. She embraced me, and clasping me to her bosom, resigned her gentle soul to endless happiness ; but, alas ! her helpless offspring was reserved to strug-

gle through a wilderness of wo, the destined victim of relentless sorrow.

“My father, whose profession called him from Avignon when I was scarcely three years old, committed the care of my education to the Abbe de Versac, a distant relation of my mother. He was a man celebrated for his profound erudition and brilliant talents: he instructed my young mind in all the elegant acquirements of a scholar and a gentleman. The labours of his anxious hours were repaid by my close application to the precepts he wished to inculcate.

“My learned and enlightened tutor, was a cynick in manner, though a philanthropist in principle; his soul was replete with all the sub-

sime sensations of pity and generosity ; he considered flattery as a baleful weed upon which fools thrive, and wise men sicken. He laughed at the wretched arrogance too often the associate of wealth, and considered the man, *born* to an exalted rank in life, as one, afflicted with an incurable disease, that infected all who approached him with the poison of duplicity.

“ What,” has he often said, “ can be a more miserable situation, than that of a man, who at the first dawn of reason, finds himself surrounded by slaves, subservient to his caprices, commending his follies, concealing his imperfections, and impregnating his docile mind with the absurd idea, that because he is *highly born*, he is virtuously supreme ! The poor and

unprotected mechanic, toils on, from youth to age, with industry and humility for his only associates ; he dreads a deviation from the paths of rectitude, because he *knows* he has no *title*, but his *good name* ; he is taught to examine his own heart, and correct its errors, because he moves in a sphere, where *truth* is not hoodwinked by interest, or fulsome applause *extorted* from the trembling tongue of fear : he has no ermined robe to guard him from the blasts of reproach ; no dazzling mask to hide him from the prying eye of justice ; he cannot, like the possessor of worldly power, laugh at the pointing finger of scorn, and trample on the *vassal*, whom NATURE formed his EQUAL ! ‘ Know,’ said he, ‘ my little pupil, you are born the proudest work of your CREATOR ! He has

given you faculties to support the dignity of your birthright, and intrepidity of soul, to stem the overwhelming torrents of insolent oppression. Look to yourself for superiority, and from every example of fallen depravity, extract a lesson of morality. Flatter not the weaknesses of the base and degraded, neither meanly withhold the tribute of applause, where the perfections of the heart demand it of you ; above all, *Remember* you are a HUMAM BEING ! endowed with intellects, and placed in a garden of luxuriant blessings, that only require *your* hand to cultivate them for your use and pleasure.'

“ Such were the precepts of the Abbe de Versac ; my observations through a life of perplexing vicissi-

tudes, have invariably convinced me of their truth and propriety.

“ At the age of seventeen I had acquired a competent knowledge of the classics, and had already composed many successful pieces in imitation of the Greek and Latin Poets. The rocks of Vaucluse, consecrated by the inspiration of the Muses, had often echoed with my matin song, and the celestial form of the immortal Laura, frequently blessed in visionary dreams the slumbers of the evening !

“ I felt rapt, inspired, as I traversed the deep valley, or mused beneath the laurelled bower, dedicated to love and virtue ! I wandered on the margin of the shallow rivulets that were once dear to the

faithful Petrarch, their murmurs soothed my pensive heart ; and, as I dropped a tear upon their bubbling surface, I experienced the conscious delight of having paid the tender tribute due to his memory and his sorrows ! Often did I cast my listless form upon the sod, made sacred by the footsteps of the wandering lover. These were my happy moments——transient indeed they were, for they now almost appear to have been the phantoms of a bewildered fancy. The subduing hand of misery has nearly erased the very shadows of my early hours ; the bright delusions of youth's glowing day are sunk in cold oblivion, as the glorious sun sets in the border of the dark and troubled ocean !

“ Filled with romantic inspira-

tion, my mind was softened like the tempered wax, and ready to receive the tenderest impressions.

“ In the vicinity of Avignon, beneath the shades of an embowering wood, devotion had long performed her sacred orisons at the monastery of Saint Tèrese ; the lofty walls were inaccessible, except on the fifteenth of June, when, at the celebration of the Fete de Dieu, the gates were thrown open, and every eye was permitted to view the solemn ceremony of the High Mass.

“ Curiosity, more than zeal, led me to be a spectator: the holy sisters, arranged in the chapel of the convent, sung their choral anthems, replete with seraphic harmony ; the vaulted arches repeated the thrilling

sounds, while the fumes of heavenly incense curled around a thousand quivering tapers. Among the vestals, my every sense was fascinated by *one*, whose beauty far surpassed all I had yet conceived of mortal woman ! A sweet melancholy gave inexpressible softness to features exquisitely regular, and the meek blush of unaffected modesty heightened a complexion beauteous and glowing as the rays of morning. Her age pronounced her but newly initiated in holy duties, and her every look declared she was formed for that world from which she was secluded, in the deep and cheerless gloom of monastic apathy. I gazed upon her with a devotion more warm, more chaste, than even piety itself could have suggested. Her eye encountered mine—I fancied a thousand

childish things ;---my earnest attention seemed to perplex her ; the crucifix fell from her trembling hand, she rose, and left the chapel.

“ I returned to Avignon. The image of this peerless angel never forsook me ; I beheld her in my midnight slumbers ; her voice vibrated on my enraptured ear, and awoke me to all the agonies of despair. Often did I wander, when the sun sunk beneath the horizon, to watch its last beam that illumined the vanes of her lonely habitation. Often did I listen whole hours beneath the hated walls that enclosed the treasure of my soul, to catch the distant and imperfect sound of the holy evening song. I fancied I could distinguish her voice from every other, and my

heart panted sadly responsive to every swelling note.

“ I remained several months in this state of perfect wretchedness, when an accident opened to my distracted mind a gleam of transitory comfort. The Abbe de Versac, disgusted with the depravity of mankind, having entered into the most rigid state of holy bondage, was frequently employed in the pious office of confessor to the Nuns of Saint Tèrese. A sudden indisposition preventing his usual attendance, I embraced the opportunity that presented itself, and, in the habit of a monk, bore to the Abbess of the convent a letter, containing a specious recommendation of myself, deputing me as worthy of the sacred confidence. I was readily admitted into the cell

of ghostly admonition, and fortune directed the heavenly Louisa to the footstool of contrition !

“ The purity of her life scarcely left her a single error to acknowledge ; my penance was as gentle as her soul was spotless : I requested her to peruse a lesson I had written for her, and to abide by the injunctions it contained ; she thanked me, then, with the voice of meekness and humility, implored my benediction, and departed.

“ My safety required that I should instantly withdraw from the sacred walls, lest the imposition should be detected, and at once destroy my reputation and my hopes. The transaction was soon made public, and I frequently heard eternal vengeance

denounced against the daring perpetrator of so vile a fraud. The Abbess offered an immense reward for apprehending the sacrilegious hypocrite, and every tongue united to condemn me. My letter acquainted her of my name, quality, and fortune ; which, by my father's death, was not inconsiderable ; I employed her compassion for my sufferings, and earnestly requested a decisive answer. I told her, in the language of despair, that nothing should induce me to survive her resentment, and concluded my frantic prayer by informing her, that I should watch ten successive nights beneath the walls that immured her, to receive the fiat of my irrevocable destiny."

CHAPTER V.

"AT the twilight hour of the seventh day, when every breeze was hushed, and Nature seemed to pause in melancholy silence, musing beneath the trees that encircled the prison of my idol, my ear was suddenly enchanted by the melody of a female voice. I drew near to the spot from whence the sound proceeded, and distinctly heard the words of her complaint: they pierced my very heart----attuning every chord to sympathetic pity."

Elvira hinted a wish that he would endeavour to recollect them; he complied with her desire, and thus began:

“ Within this drear and silent gloom,
The lost Louisa pines unknown ;
Fate shrouds her in a living tomb,
And Heaven relentless hears her groan :
Yet, 'midst the murky shades of wo,
The tear of fond regret shall flow.

“ Yon lofty wall, that mocks my grief,
Still echoes with my evening prayer :
The gale that fans the trembling leaf
Shall waft it through the realms of air,
Till prostrate at the throne of Heaven,
Unpity'd Love shall be forgiven !

“ Or, if to endless sorrow born—
If doom'd to fade a victim here ;
Still pining, friendless, and forlorn,
Ah ! let Religion drop one tear :
Like holy incense shall it prove,
To heal the wounds of hopeless Love.

“ Ye black'ning clouds that sail along,
Oh, hide me in your shade profound ;
Ye whisp'ring breezes, catch my song,
And bear it to the woods around.
Perchance some hapless Petrarch's feet
May wander near this dread retreat.

“ Ah ! tell him Love's delicious strain
No rapture yields, no joy inspires,

Where cold Religion's icy chain
Has long subdu'd its quiv'ring fires ;
No ray of comfort gilds the gloom,
That marks the hapless vestal's tomb !

" The ruby gem within my breast
Now faintly glows with vital heat ;
Each warring passion sinks to rest :
My freezing pulses slowly beat.
Soon shall these languid eye-lids close,
And Death's stern mandate seal my woes.

" Then, when the virgin's matin song
Shall 'midst the vaulted roof resound,
Haply the tuneful seraph throng
Shall whisper gentle pity round ;
While VIRGIL, sighing o'er my bier,
Shall drop unseen—A SAINTED TEAR !

" From that moment I determined to release the beautiful Louisa, or perish beneath the flinty confines of her prison ; the difficulties attending such an undertaking, and the dreadful punishments that would be inflicted on the perpetrators of such

a crime, rendered every precaution necessary to ensure success.

“ Chance, however, completed what years of indefatigable industry might not have accomplished: the Abbess of Saint Tèrese was suddenly attacked by an alarming indisposition, her life was supposed to be in extreme danger, and as the Lady Louisa was of the highest rank among the holy sisterhood, she was entrusted with the entire government of the Convent, and unlimited possession of the rights of a superior. It was not difficult, under these circumstances, to accomplish her wish; my letters were delivered without creating the smallest suspicion, and the rapturous hour was appointed for her escape from misery.

“ Her heart was susceptible of the finest passions ; she relied on my honour, and I never deceived her. She had long considered herself as a victim doomed to eternal solitude ; the extraordinary and unexpected change my propositions presented, the prospect of happiness that opened to her soul, gave energy to hope, and strength to resolution ! I provided horses, and a convenient disguise ; Heaven smiled upon the deed, and gave to my fond arms the beautiful Louisa.

“ We traversed the wood for some miles, and taking the route towards Marseilles, in three days reached that port in safety.

“ There we were united in holy bands. The mistress of my affec-

tions became the wife of my bosom! and I——became the proud possessor of a treasure, worlds could not have purchased !

“ Having procured a vessel, we set sail for Florence ; the winds were propitious, we arrived unmolested at Leghorn, and from thence proceeded to the most beautiful city in the universe !

“ My adored Louisa, whose early days had been devoted to religious duties, evinced not the smallest desire to relinquish the delights of retirement ; her mind, accustomed to an uninterrupted scene of tranquillity, dreaded to engage in the tumultuous bustle of the busy world. We hired a beautiful little villa in the vicinity of Florence, and, blest

in the full possession of all that mutual affection and mental gratification could afford, looked down with pity on the proudest distinctions in the power of any earthly monarch to bestow !

“ Three delicious years of perfect happiness cemented the bonds of un-deviating attachment, when a ragatta, in celebration of the Pope’s accession, awoke the attention, and excited the curiosity of all ranks of people.

“ My Louisa was tempted to partake of the amusement ; and in the midst of delightful festivity, when every heart bounded with rapture—*mine* alone received the dreadful fiat of eternal anguish.

“ The ARNO was beautifully serene ; the silvery surface reflecting, as in a gently moving mirror, the verdant banks sloping to the margin, enamelled with flowers, and crowded with spectators. Thousands of little boats, decorated with variegated streamers, were seen skimming along the lucid current ; some containing the most dulcet harmony, and others lightly shading with their silken awnings, the sparkling eyes and roseate blushes of enchanting beauty !

“ My Louisa was charmed with this new and fascinating *spectacle*. Our *barchetta*, which was decorated with festoons of myrtle, was gently rowed by youths, dressed in the habits of Arcadian shepherds. The

mind, soothed to repose by the enchanting scene, sunk into that sweet indolence, which, like the slumbers of wearied and exhausted nature, replenishes its faculties, and awakens its perfections to renovated lustre! My Louisa reclined her gentle form upon a mattress of yellow taffata; the warmth of the evening heightened the glow upon her lovely cheek, and threw a delicious languor on her eyes, that rendered her the object of universal admiration!

“ My heart was full of rapture—
I beheld my precious treasure with
more delight than language can describe. The universe had nothing to bestow on me, beyond what I possessed, and my enchanted senses could scarcely conceive any thing

more divine, even in the regions of celestial happiness !

“ We arrested our oars, to gratify the soul with the exquisite harmony proceeding from a magnificent barge moored near the margin of the river ; when, on a sudden, a young man, of athletic form and noble mien, darted forward, and, seizing my beloved Louisa, was bearing her in his arms to a boat along-side of us.

“ Every nerve that quivered round my heart, throbbed at this unexpected outrage ; the stranger committed his prize to the care of his companions, then advancing towards me, while the lightnings of revenge flashed from his indignant eyes, drew a stiletto from his sleeve, and aimed

a stroke at my unguarded breast. I warded off the blow, and turned his dastard weapon on himself.—The point entered his heart—he sunk breathless at my feet.

“Louisa opened her beauteous eyes to all the horrors of despair and death!---She had only time to exclaim, “MY BROTHER!” when the life-blood rushing from her convulsive lip---she hid her icy cheek in my distracted bosom---and instantly EXPIRED!

“Frenzy now seizing on my tortured brain, suggested the foul crime of self-annihilation; but justice, like a pitying cherubim, snatched the dire weapon, reeking with kindred blood, from my assassin hand. I was torn from the lifeless victims of

impatience, and thrown into the dungeon of horror and repentance.... The Count de Clairville, the brother of my murdered angel, was the only relation relentless fate had left her ; her *name* is now extinct—but her *virtues* are immortal ! She had been compelled to take the veil from a base and little pride, which too frequently sacrifices the younger female branches of illustrious, but indigent families, to a barbarous and perpetual imprisonment.

“ The unfortunate De Clairville was returning from his travels ; destined to a military life, he had lately received a commission, and was hastening to join his regiment, then at Lyons.

“ He had long given up the fruit-

less search after his adored sister—
FATE brought her to his view—then
closed his eyes for ever.

“The Count having given the first
assault, my punishment was miti-
gated ; my doom ten years impri-
sonment ; and afterwards, perpetual
banishment from a country, whose
laws I had violated, and whose an-
nals I had stained with blood. The
former part of my sentence expired
in days of weeping, and in nights of
anguish—’till the excess of grief pro-
duced a sullen stupor, that rendered
me insensible to every calamity.

“Time gave again to my sad eyes
the cheerful light of Heaven, and
with it, all the pangs of fatal recol-
lection ! Driven from society, an
alien to my native country—an out-

cast from every hope of future happiness—alone, unfriended, lost, forgotten—I knew not whither to direct my course, one half of my little fortune was forfeited to the state, and meagre poverty stretched forth her icy fangs to seal my destiny. By perseverance through a long and painful journey, I arrived in Spain, a wanderer, and unknown, labouring under all the agonies of conscious misery.

“ I have from that hour resided among the mountains in the vicinity of Madrid. My little hovel was too obscure to excite curiosity, and its solitary tenant too poor to dread interruption. Poverty and sorrow are the strongest securities against the intrusions of mankind ; let *adversity* guard your threshold, and you may

linger through an uninterrupted life of mournful seclusion.

“ Yet I do not presume to repine, for alas! every hour convinces me that prayers and tears are not sufficient to expiate my crimes. The penance I have imposed upon myself, is a sad and tedious pilgrimage to Loretto, and the first instance I experience of divine benignity, is the benevolent hospitality I now enjoy in the forest of Vancenza.”

The Pilgrim, rising from his wicker chair, bowed respectful to his lovely auditors. Elvira gave his sorrows a tributary tear—it fell upon his hand that rested on his staff as she stood near him—he pressed it to his lips-----it revived his mournful

heart—for it was the holy tear of
commiserating virtue!

Before the sun rose from its eastern
canopy, the Pilgrim resumed his toil-
some journey of penitence and sor-
row. The following melancholy
verses were found upon the table in
the chamber where he had passed the
night :

O'er deserts untrodden, o'er moss-cover'd hills,
I have wander'd forlorn and alone :
My tears I have mingled with slow-winding rills,
And the rocks have repeated my groan.

I have seen the wan moon from her silver veil
peep,
As she rose from her cloud-dappled bed ;
I have heard the dread hurricane yell 'midst the
deep,
As the lightning play'd over my head.

When the tempest subsided, I saw the faint dawn
O'er the eastern cliff meekly appear ;

THE DANGERS OF CREDULITY. 69

While each king-cup that droop'd on the dew-
spangled lawn

From its golden lids dropp'd a soft tear.

I have seen the bright day-star illumine the earth,

I have hail'd the proud SOV'REIGN OF FIRE;

I have mark'd the pale *primrose*, scarce waken'd
to birth,

Ere I sigh'd to behold it expire.

How oft have I pitied the plaint of the dove,

How I've mus'd near the nightingale's nest!

For, ah! when the minstrel sung sweetly of love,

'Twas soft sympathy thrill'd thro' my breast.

I have seen the tall forest o'ershadow the glade,

And extend its broad branches on high;

But how soon have I mark'd its rich canopy fade,

And its yellow leaves whirl'd to the sky!

I have sigh'd o'er the sod where some lover was
laid;

I have torn the rude weeds from his breast;

I have deck'd it with flowrets, and oft have I said,

"How I envy thy pallet of rest!"

I have trac'd the long shades of the wave's silky
green,

When the storm gather'd over the main;

I have gaz'd with delight on the landscape serene,

When the ev'ning-bell toll'd on the plain.

Exulting and gay, I have smil'd to behold,
Proud Nature luxuriantly drest;
I have wept when I saw her uncover'd and cold,
And the winter blast howl'd o'er her breast.

Since such are the scenes of this valley of care,
Since each pleasure is mingled with pain;
Still let me the raptures of sympathy share,
And my bosom shall scorn to complain.

Tho' destin'd to wander o'er mountains of snow,
VANCENZA, oh! mansion divine!
The PILGRIM shall smile at his journey of wo,
And his heart, HIS WARM HEART, shall be
THINE.

CHAPTER VII.

SEVERAL weeks passed slowly away, when the soft perfumes of returning spring impregnated the atmosphere with health, and called forth buds and flowers from earth's rich bosom.

Elvira, whose form was but the shadow of declining beauty, whose cheek was faded by perpetual anxiety, and whose eye shot timid lustre beneath its dark long curtains, now sunk into a state of alarming melancholy. The amiable graces of the Prince Almanza were pictured in her heart's core. The gentle sylph that hovers on the breath of love, often snatched a sigh, just parting

from her lip, while the memory of the respected Vancenza claimed it as a tribute of grateful sensibility.

The fatal story, so exquisitely described on the window of the gallery: the extraordinary key, committed to her care with such awful solemnity; the mortifying idea of depending upon the bounty of the Marchioness, whose slender income was barely sufficient to support her own dignity; and the approaching hour when she should be compelled to quit for ever the only home she had been accustomed to acknowledge, or capable of enjoying, filled her heart with inconceivable regret. Often did she lament not having been born to a life of laborious industry; and as often did she blame the mistaken tenderness with which she had

been educated; and which had circumscribed the line of her accomplishments to the *elegant*, rather than the *useful*. "The polish my understanding has received," said she, "has only inspired it with sentiments to make me feel with double poignancy my want of fortune. How injudicious is that preceptor, who inculcates the principles of refinement, without fortifying the mind to receive the shocks of fate, by accustoming it to the disappointments and vicissitudes it was formed to encounter. A too fond indulgence, is a sort of cruelty that prepares the foundation of innumerable calamities. If I was not born to independence, why was I nursed in the bosom of luxury? I cannot have been guilty of any crime that deserves the punishment of humilia-

tion ; and my generous protector was too liberal to inflict unnecessary pangs on an heart moulded to his own opinions, and cherished by his bounty and affection. It is evident the Marchioness de Vallorie is unacquainted with my origin ; she would not keep me in a degree of suspense, that preys upon my health, and destroys my every hour of joy and tranquillity."

A thousand conflicting agonies obtruded themselves upon her feelings: the dread of emerging from her retirement, to encounter the sneers and insults of envious superiors, was over-ruled by the abhorrence her proud heart felt, when she considered herself as existing in a state of miserable *dependence*. " I had rather," said the amiable Orphan,

“toil through a life of incessant labour, than yield to the caprices of the great, or impoverish the slender income of my beloved Marchioness. Perhaps it may please Heaven to deprive me even of *her* protection—— what then will be my fate? to seek for support by obscure industry, or to depend upon the frowns and smiles of some unfeeling wealthy patroness, who will condescend to afford me an asylum, not for the exquisite gratifications of a refined soul, but for the purpose of displaying a base and unworthy ostentation.”

These reflections determined Elvira, as soon as their right of inhabiting the castle expired, to seek, by the most delicate and honourable means, for some employment that

would enable her to enjoy the tranquil hour of BLESSED INDEPENDENCE !

The castle, which was once the scene of eternal delight and instructive recreation, was now transformed into the gloomy cavern of perpetual mourning. All the old domestics were discharged, except the steward, one venerable man-servant, and the female attendants absolutely necessary for the business of the household.

The gay and inquisitive Carline now began to feel a strong conviction, that those pursuits, falsely termed the pleasures of the world, are in reality its greatest plagues. The young unpractised heart pictures a thousand nameless and bewitching attractions, conceives delights, and anticipates

scenes of bliss, which are nothing more than the mere phantoms of a lively and warm imagination. Youth that is totally sequestered from society, is restless, peevish, dissatisfied, and perpetually repining after visions, only created to glitter in "the mind's eye." The idea of something delightful, because unknown, excludes the reflection, that every rose, which decorates the gaudy paths of life, conceals its thorn to make our journey painful. The only wise and certain remedy for a discontented spirit, is to let it once taste the bitter draught, eternally presented by the hand of folly, even in the most flattering scenes of splendid allurements. Experience will pour conviction into the soul, and imprint a lesson upon the mind, that wisdom and philosophy may

hope to teach in vain, repaid only with contempt, or placed to the thankless account of a barbarous severity. Let inexperienced youth follow the example of the skilful pilot, who sets sail upon the smooth and placid ocean ;---not charmed into supposed security by its mild alluring aspect, or trusting to its gently swelling billows, but cautiously prepared to avoid the treacherous rocks concealed beneath the glittering surface, to shatter and destroy him.

The Marchioness, who had always been of a serious and pensive disposition, now dedicated every moment to the duties of religion. Carline's lively sallies and childish vivacity gave place to the most studious gravity ; while Elvira employed her

lonely days in the acquirement of musical perfection.

Their occupations being totally abstracted from each other, they were necessarily separated for many hours in the day. The stillness of retirement tended rather to increase their melancholy, while the gaudy pleasures of existence faded in the sober gloom of mental cultivation.

The death of the Count Vancenza was felt and acknowledged as a general calamity ; the cloud of sorrow hung over the whole forest ; the village sports were now at an end, the castle gate, once thrown open by the hand of hospitality, now almost perpetually closed, gave the habitation the appearance of a monastery. The silent hours were marked by the

slow vibrations of the clock on the high turret, whose hollow sound once died unheeded on the passing gale. The old faithful mastiff, that once run playfully about the castle, now grown savage by confinement, growled at the wretched beggar that assailed the gate, and even forgot the hand that used to feed him. The owl screamed in the lonely battlement, and every babbling gossip in the forest told some strange story of horrid import to her credulous neighbour. The midnight visits of the Duke del Verò, which had been whispered about, but had long been forgotten, now gave birth to innumerable idle tales, and many inhabitants of the adjacent cottages solemnly affirmed, that the vision constantly glided round the walls of the castle at certain hours of the night.

The domestics were afraid to go on household errands to the neighbouring village, and looked with eager expectation for the day that was to release them from what they termed the haunted forest.

Elvira, who well knew the origin of these absurd stories, often smiled at the timidity of Carline, who implicitly believed them, not without sometimes giving her a severe lecture upon the folly of superstition.

Several months elapsed in an unvarying round of pensive application. The Prince Almanza, whose respect for Elvira had ripened into the most ardent affection, and who had essayed every probable means of administering consolation to an heart deeply and sensibly impressed with

the image of his idolatry, determined to visit once more the delightful retreat, where he had received such distinguished marks of attention and esteem. "Why should I," said he, "suffer a mean and degrading pride to deprive me of that, which can alone render life desirable? The charms of Elvira are of themselves a treasure of the most inestimable value ; her virtues place her above the trifling distinctions of rank or fortune ; the exalted dignity of her mind would confer splendour on any situation. I feel a secret sympathy that bids me participate every pang her youth and unprotected innocence may suffer." With this impression he departed from Madrid, and every moment, until he reached Vancenza, served to strengthen the resolution he had formed.

It was evening when he arrived at the castle. He found the outward gate unbarred, the great court-yard was covered with long grass, and the Gothic hall unoccupied by its usual train of domestics. He proceeded through the gallery ; the setting sun cast a gloomy crimson light through the painted windows : the portraits of the family, for many generations, still decorated the damp walls, covered with faded tapestry. His footsteps echoed as he passed along ; Elvira heard them as she entered from the terrace ; her heart palpitated with apprehension, that some supernatural being occasioned the unusual sound ; she listened, she opened the folding door at the top of the gallery, and gently advancing, perceived at the farthest end, by the

dim light, the figure of a man. "Heaven defend me !" exclaimed Elvira.

The Prince, at the sound of her voice, hastened towards her, and taking her trembling hand, conducted her to her study.

The Marchioness and Carline soon joined them. Their first inquiries were after the Duke del Vero. The Prince observed a sudden and deep glow upon Elvira's cheek. He considered it as an ill omen, and a full confirmation of her attachment to his friend. The Marchioness smiled, and the conversation turned upon another topic.

In the course of the evening the Duke's name was repeatedly men-

tioned ; and as often Elvira's trembling confusion and involuntary blushes betrayed the secret uneasiness she felt. There remained not a shadow of hope in her breast that the Prince was unacquainted with the imprudent interview at the cottage ; and she had every reason to fear, from the general character of Del Vero, that the adventure had been related with every disadvantage to her. She experienced all the unpleasant sensations that a delicate and ingenuous mind suffers under the false imputation of guilt.—She knew, that from the moment a woman places her reputation in the power of an undeserving object, she is no longer mistress of her own happiness ; as perpetual dread of disgrace is worse than even the full conviction of the most atrocious

crimes, she becomes the wretched and fearful dependant upon the mercy of her enemy, at all times liable to the contempt and shame he may draw upon her :—he, on the other hand, holds himself the entire master of all her actions—a frown intimidates her ; a sneer overwhelms her with apprehension—her good name is only maintained at his option, and if he proves a tyrant, she becomes a *slave*, if not his VICTIM.

Supper was announced in the saloon, and after an hour's conversation, Elvira and Carline retired to rest. The Prince was left alone with the Marchioness de Vallorie.

After a moment's pause, " I request you to believe, Madam," said the Prince, " the last idea that could

enter my mind would be that of intruding upon the retirement of this amiable family. I came hither charmed with the delicious hope that I had penetration sufficient to discover the sentiments of Elvira's heart ; but I find my vanity misled me. I esteem my friend the Duke del Vero, and should have rejoiced to have seen him united to so amiable a woman ; had I conceived"——

Here the Marchioness interrupted him ; " You were not mistaken," replied she----" Elvira has given too many proofs of her admiration of the Duke, to deny her partiality for him ; but I know the delicacy of her soul, and am convinced that she would rather suffer whole ages of anxiety, than betray a thought that

might expose her to ridicule or contempt."

"The event interests me exceedingly, and I wish to be satisfied," rejoined the Prince; "I shall confess an eternal obligation to you, Madam, if you will speak to Elvira upon the subject. I love the Duke as dearly as a brother; his felicity would be mine; and I esteem the charming Elvira too much not to promote hers, whatever may be my feelings upon the occasion."

"I am well apprized," said the Marchioness, "of the libertine character of the Duke del Vero. Elvira is no stranger to it; but her heart will not suffer her to follow the dictates of reason, and I am fully con-

vinced her whole happiness centers in the man, whom, of all others, she ought to condemn." "How?" replied Almanza, "by what means are you convinced of Elvira's passion for the Duke?"

"By every possible and probable means," said the Marchioness; "by her melancholy, from the first day she ever beheld him; her regret at his quitting the castle; her blushes whenever chance threw him in her way during her residence at Madrid; her cold indifference of the distinctions you publicly bestowed upon her; her declining health since she has been deprived of his society, and her evident confusion whenever his name is mentioned."

"You are perfectly right, Ma-

dam," said Almanza, "but are you satisfied respecting the Duke's intentions towards Elvira?"

"That he loves her," resumed the Marchioness, "is beyond a single doubt; the peasants in the villages wherever we stopped, were speaking of nothing but the Duke del Vero's passion for the Orphan of Vancenza. — Indeed she confessed to me, at Madame Montalba's assembly, that she was overpowered by his attentions.

Almanza was deeply afflicted by this intelligence; there remained not a doubt of its authenticity in his opinion---and he was almost driven to despair.

"I will be fully convinced," said

he, "I request a decisive answer as soon as possible;---my friend will be the happiest of mortals!-----Elvira is the most adorable of women!"

"She is indeed an angel!" replied the Marchioness; "her perfections are inestimable; her heart is the throne of sensibility and virtue! the Duke will possess, indeed, a gem unequalled!"

"*Happy Del Vero!*" exclaimed the Prince——

"Elvira will be delighted," said the Marchioness, "when she finds that her choice is sanctioned by *you*, as there is no person for whom she entertains a more perfect *esteem*."

Almanza could no longer support this mortifying conversation.—He retired, in the most agonizing state of solicitude.

The Marchioness determined the next morning to acquaint Elvira of the Prince's request, and her excellent heart anticipated the pleasure she hoped to convey to the amiable Orphan.

CHAPTER VIII.

EARLY in the morning the Marchioness repaired to Elvira's apartment; she was just risen, having passed the night in the most painful reflections. "You look melancholy, my lovely friend," said the Marchioness, "but I have something to communicate that I know will give you pleasure. I have the Prince Almanza's orders to acquaint you with the motive of his visit."

"The Prince Almanza's orders, Madam!" replied Elvira,—"the motive of his visit!" She grew pale, and her voice faltered.

“ Yes, my Elvira,” rejoined the Marchioness, “ he is no stranger to the cause of your dejection ; he is acquainted with the state of your heart-- and is charmed with the idea of accelerating your wishes.”

“ Madam, I have no *wish* that can interest the Prince Almanza,” replied Elvira, “ my vanity never will lead me into so gross an error.— Whatever I may feel, I am certain no part of my conduct could authorize such a conjecture.”

“ Why are you so agitated ?” said the Marchioness, “ I know your affections are engaged to one, who with gratitude returns your passion ; ---why then suffer a childish and false delicacy to prevent your avowal of what so much interests you ? Indeed

this *mauvaise bonte* is unpardonable. The Prince Almanza intreats you to give him a decisive answer ; politeness at least requires your immediate decision."

" I request you will allow me a few hours to collect my spirits" said Elvira ; " I am indeed overpowered with the Prince's goodness—But the honour---the happiness --the distinction---is too much for me to support in my present state of perplexity."-----" Shall I give the Prince some reason to *hope*?" replied the Marchioness.

" The Prince has no reason to suppose his generosity will be ill bestowed," rejoined Elvira, with the most awkward timidity.

The Marchioness smiled, and withdrew ;---Elvira burst into tears of rapture !

The party assembled at breakfast. Elvira was overwhelmed with confusion--the Prince respectfully reserved---the Marchioness in high spirits ; and Carline enjoying the general embarrassment.

As soon as the repast was finished, Elvira left the room, and repaired to the terrace. The Prince observed her from the window, and immediately followed her. " Have you any commands to Madrid, Madam ?" said he, bowing with cold respect.

" I have no reason," replied Elvira, " to remember any person at

Madrid with pleasure, and I believe there is no one *there* that would be flattered by *my* attentions." "Have you nothing to communicate to the Duke del Vero?" rejoined the Prince.----Elvira, whose heart had prepared itself for a very different conversation, could scarcely refrain from tears; she endeavoured to conceal her mortification by a forced smile, and was quitting the terrace, when Almanza *repeated* his question. She could no longer disguise her emotion, and with a tone of firm resentment, she replied, "It ill becomes the dignity or generosity of *your* character to insult or distress an unprotected woman---The laws of gallantry cannot authorize, and every honourable mind must shudder at such an outrage. If you hope to humble my vanity, you deceive

yourself ; for I have nothing to be proud of, except an heart which even the Duke del Vero's slander cannot contaminate !”

“ I am sorry,” said the Prince, “ that you do not think me worthy of your confidence: the Duke, my friend, cannot be so blind to his own happiness, as to offend the woman whom he adores, and who has given him so many *proofs* of her esteem.”

“ I do not comprehend your meaning,” answered Elvira ; “ the adoration of a professed libertine cannot flatter the vanity of a discerning woman, any more than his calumny can tarnish her reputation: she who does not laugh at the one, and despise the other, must be weak indeed.”

“ Then it is your opinion,” said the Prince, “ that a woman is capable of despising, and laughing at, the object of her affections ?

“ Indeed you are mistaken,” replied Elvira ; “ I cannot relinquish the conviction, that esteem must be the parent of affection : no woman of sense can ever love one, whom she knows to be an unworthy object.”

“ I trust,” said Almanza with a penetrating look, “ the Duke del Vero will never give you reason to alter your sentiments : honoured with your *regard*, he will indeed be the most envied of men ; and may he perish, the moment he ceases to value it !”

“ The Duke is my aversion,” re-

plied Elvira ; “ he knows it ; and this is an ungenerous contrivance to insult me. I am not surprised at any act of baseness *he* may be guilty of ; but I lament that the Prince Almanza should be the dupe of *such* a friend.”

The arrival of the Marchioness put an end to their distressing conversation. Elvira joyfully embraced the opportunity of retiring. On entering the house, she met the lively Carline. “ Whither are you hastening, my little *Princess* ?” said she, taking her hand : “ you shall not escape our congratulations so easily : why, your happiness seems to sit heavily upon your heart ; for Heaven’s sake, let it lay by its old suit of mourning, and adopt a more lively and consistent appearance.”

“Are *you* too in league with my enemies?” replied Elvira: “then I am wretched indeed! Ungenerous Carline!”

Elvira, no longer able to support her fancied humiliation, hastened to her chamber, and sought relief from reflection.

The Prince, unable to account for this extraordinary behaviour, resolved to depart immediately. He communicated his intentions to the Marchioness de Vallorie; who was equally astonished at the supposed change in Elvira's sentiments.

“I came hither,” said Almanza, “to offer an heart filled with the most ardent enthusiasm for the vir-

tues of your lovely Elvira ! I now perceive that we have mistaken each other : yet I am unwilling to leave the castle with the distracting idea that my conduct has made an unfavourable impression on the mind of the most charming of women ! I conjure you, madam, to obtain my pardon for the arrogance that led me to believe my proposals would not be rejected.---Tell her, Almanza will no more offend her ; that his life would have been dedicated to her happiness, and his heart devoted to her service. If Elvira would allow me the honour of a few moments conversation, I think I could convince her of my respect for *her* character, and obliterate any false impression she may entertain of *mine*. ---Let me intreat you, madam, to

procure me such an interview, and to witness the zeal I shall employ to deprecate her resentment."

"Elvira," replied the Marchioness, "is too liberal, and too well bred, to refuse you an opportunity of vindicating your conduct." She left the room; and in a few minutes returned, with Elvira.

"I request that you will make no apology," said Elvira, smiling with the graceful meekness of complacency; "we misunderstood each other; and I entreat that the conversation of this morning may be forgotten."

"Hear me, Elvira," said Almanza; "I am your slave, and you have the power to command my silence;

yet you are too generous to tyrannize over your captive.----Suffer him to wear your chains ; but let them be *eternal*, and such as no earthly power can break asunder.----Say you will be *mine*, beauteous Elvira ! Pronounce my destiny ! It depends on you, and you *only*."

Elvira's agitation chained her tongue. She *looked* a thousand unutterable things.----Her broken sigh was the signal of consent ; and the soft smile of blushing rapture evidently proclaimed the triumphs of her heart.

CHAPTER IX.

ALMANZA, whose delight was unbounded, knew not how sufficiently to evince his satisfaction ; every profuse and liberal exertion of hospitality spread its enlivening transports through the forest ; every cottage was converted into a little Elysium. The villages were crouded with rustics, engaged in a variety of sportive gambols. The castle gates were thrown open to receive all ranks of people, who chose to unite in celebrating the triumphs of virtue!----- The gentle Elvira, accompanied by her friends, visited every part of the forest, distributing bliss with the

open hand of liberality. The Prince sent dispatches to Madrid with the joyful intelligence ; his palace was the scene of splendid festivity, and every heart was bounding with impatience for the arrival of the lovely Princess !

The Marchioness, who had little inclination to visit Madrid, made it her earnest request that the marriage ceremony might be performed at Vancenza. " After which," said she, " I will retire with my daughter to Naples, and end my life in solitude and peace."

Elvira insisted that her young friend should remain with her ; the Prince earnestly seconded her request, and the Marchioness consented. Every persuasive argument was

employed to over-rule the Marchioness's resolution respecting herself, but in vain.

The day of solemn contract was named ; the interval, which was only one week, was barely sufficient to arrange the marriage settlements, and to prepare the palace at Madrid for the reception of the illustrious pair. The Prince departed. His last *adieu* was the bond of eternal fidelity, sealed with a kiss that *angels might have envied!*

Elvira, whose mind almost experienced a new creation, could scarcely support the unusual state of rapture so unexpectedly prepared for her. Her former thoughts had been either silently serene, or mournfully dejected. The extatic joys of un-

bounded and mutual affection, the unlimited power of bestowing comfort on the unfortunate, the opportunity of repaying all the kind offices of friendship she had experienced at Vancenza, and the possession of the generous heart of her adored Almanza ; presented such a profusion of delight, that she was almost induced to consider herself transported by a vision of bewildered imagination.

Carline was doubly gratified by the event. The happiness of her friend, and the prospect of again entering into the gay world, by turns enraptured her fancy. She was all vivacity ! all ecstasy ! all expectation !

The young friends were employed

from sun rise to the close of every day in making splendid preparations. The lofty apartment of the castle were decorated with luxuriant wreaths of flowers ; every thing that elegant simplicity could bestow, presented itself to the eye, and the approaching triumphs of transcendent perfection filled every bosom with the throbs of gratulation.

The long picture gallery was destined for the principal scene of festivity. Carline objected to its melancholy appearance, and insisted that the uncouth tapestry, and dumb assembly of warlike ancestors, and austere matrons, whose hideous paraphernalia and solemn frowns would damp the pleasures of the day, should be removed to some obscure apartment.

“We will have the walls hung with silk, and festooned with myrtle,” said she, “the dismal roof shall be divested of its old tattered banners, and for once throw off its moth-eaten magnificence ; the window shall be opened to the terrace, where the swains and rustic lasses shall dance and revel---the gothic recess at the end of the gallery shall be stripped of its rusty trophies and formidable armour—and be converted into an orchestra.”

Elvira smiled at her lively conceits, and having prevailed upon the Marchioness to consent, the next day was fixed upon for the demolition of the ancient adornments.

The ceremony of dislodging the gothic assembly was commenced

with some degree of compunction on the part of Elvira, she felt attached to them by a kind of unaccountable sympathy, which is sometimes inspired even by the most inanimate objects. They had nearly removed one half of the grotesque society; when taking down a large frame, containing the portrait of a beautiful woman, Elvira's eye was instantly struck with the *pannel* it had concealed.

It was of a singular form, with a small square in the centre, and a plate of brass at one corner of it.

This extraordinary appearance of some secret repository, filled her heart with trembling agitation. She requested the servant to leave the gallery; and, securing the door,

with prophetic timidity approached the *fatal pannel*.

For some moments she stood motionless, and almost petrified with horror !

At length with slow and tottering steps, she advanced towards the wainscot ; her hand, cold as monumental marble, presented the key, which the venerable Count had given to her in his last moments.

Without the smallest difficulty she removed the brass plate, the wards found easy access, and the small door of the recess flew open with resistless violence !

“ Merciful Heaven ! ” exclaimed Elvira, “ what can this mean ? ”

She would have departed, but her feet were rivetted to the ground.

The spot where she stood was near the window, upon whose transparent tablet, the *well-known* lines were written.

She gazed upon them for some moments—they inspired her with courage.

“Fate leads me on,” exclaimed Elvira, in a low and solemn voice,—
“I will obey, even though I *perish*.”

Within the hollow space, evidently contrived for the purpose, stood a small casket of massy gold, fastened with three broad badges of wax, bearing the arms of Vancenza.

Elvira was still unable to move ; her soul was chilled with fear, and she scarcely breathed, lest the sound of respiration should chase the wondrous vision from her view ; for she could not believe the reality of what she beheld !

The Marchioness awoke her from her reverie, by knocking at the folding doors : the sound echoed like thunder along the vaulted roof.

She flew to give her admittance ; and seizing her hand, with a countenance of wild despair, led her to the mysterious casket, trembling and astonished !

“ What can this casket contain ? ”
said the Marchioness.

“Heaven only knows,” replied Elvira? “I dare not venture to remove it—yet, what have I to dread? I have never injured any human being; but my heart grows cold within my bosom, at the idea of something *extraordinary!*”

The Marchioness advanced; then hesitated——Elvira checked her hand as she raised it towards the recess.

The Marchioness, with extreme caution, at length released the casket from its prison. Elvira, whose eager eye never, even for an instant, lost sight of the precious treasure, accompanied her to her chamber. Carline was immediately apprized of the circumstance, and they prepared

for the awful ceremony of inspecting its contents.

The Marchioness, with fear and trembling, having broken the seals that were placed on the front, proceeded to lift up the cover. It appeared, to the timid hand employed in the office, to be of uncommon weight.

Thus far having accomplished the task of dreadful inquiry, they discovered a small crimson-velvet case fastened with clasps of gold. Upon opening it, they found it contained several sheets of paper closely covered with lines, evidently written by a female hand.

Elvira, gently pressing the Marchioness's arm, in a tremulous tone,

entreated her——to *forbear* a moment.

She obeyed the injunction; for she observed Elvira's cheek blanched with the icy touch of secret horror. Carline, taking her hand, embraced it with the tenderness of a sister.

They gazed on each other with silent attention.

Elvira, bending her eyes towards the papers which lay on the table, exclaimed, "Gracious God! I have seen these characters before!" The sad complaint inscribed upon the gallery window, was imprinted on her brain: the exact similarity chilled her almost to instant annihilation.

The Marchioness soothingly enquired, whether or not she should proceed ?

Elvira bowed consent—they drew their chairs round the table—the manuscript was unfolded, and the last page presented the signature of “ MADELINE VANCENZA.”

“ Alas !” said the Marchioness, “ it is the writing of my amiable sister!—shall I read the contents ? My lovely Elvira, your exquisitely feeling heart has deceived you—it is nothing more than some family record—have you any curiosity to hear it read ?”

Elvira having considerably recovered her spirits, expressed her acquiescence by a gentle smile: it

was the patient ensign of meek submission, diffusing a tempered animation, over the pale cheek of wounded sensibility!

CHAPTER X.

THE first page contained nothing more than a short address to whoever should discover the secret panel.

The second was scarcely legible, being blotted by the marks of many drops of water ; probably the tears of the unfortunate writer.—The following pages were, with some difficulty, decyphered :

“ When the hand that writes, and the heart that dictates these lines, are freezing on the dreary pallet of the grave ; when the faint traces of

my sorrows shall fade before the obliterating wing of time; perchance some kindred eye may drop the last commiserating tear, and wash out the remembrance of my woes for ever.

“ Yet, ere my name is consigned to endless oblivion; ere I relinquish the dear solitudes, the tender name of mother, I call to aid the feeble powers of an exhausted frame, and dedicate my last moments to this task of sorrow.

“ If this fatal record should be discovered during the life of the Count Vancenza, to him I bequeath it.— If he should have quitted this transitory state, to meet his unfortunate sister in the abodes of bliss—I request that the Marchioness de Vallo-

rie will preserve it, as the last legacy of her affectionate Madeline."

The Marchioness, raising her eyes towards Heaven, suffused with tears, pressed the paper to her lips, and proceeded.

"To the generosity of my brother I am indebted for an asylum, when the insolence of unfeeling pride, and the taunts of rigid propriety, would have sullied the honour, and stamped indelible disgrace upon the name of my illustrious ancestors .

"When I came to the Castle of Vancenza, I was the *credulous* victim of an illicit passion, the effects of which soon became visible to the observing eye of the Count, my bro-

ther ;——but the dread of exposure, and his unbounded affection for me, induced him to conceal my disgrace, and to promise eternal protection to my then unborn—ELVIRA !”

The Marchioness ventured to meet Elvira's eyes---her countenance bespoke the agitation of her soul---she sighed as if her very heart would break.---Carline took her hand, and pressed it tenderly ; it was *convulsed* and *cold*.

The Marchioness proceeded——

“ Justice to myself and to my child, whose innocent eyes are now fixed upon me, as if exploring the secret avenues to my sad heart, obliges me to avow, in the most solemn manner, the fatal cause of

her existence, and *my* eternal anguish.

“ During the absence of the Count, my brother, who was employed in the service of his country at the siege of Grenada ; it is well known at Madrid, that I was left under the protection of the late Princess Almanza: she was a woman of infinite accomplishments, and most exemplary piety. My young mind received an edifying lesson from the purity of her manners, and the example failed not to inspire me with a just veneration for the innumerable virtues of my amiable patroness.

“ My elder sister, now Marchioness de Vallorie, was particularly attached to a life of religious retirement; she presided in a convent at Naples,

I had no other female relation, and my only intercourse with her was by epistolary correspondence.

“ I had attained my nineteenth year, when the Princess died, leaving an only son, the darling of her heart, to console her afflicted husband, under the severest calamity to which human nature is liable.

“ During many months I was his only associate ; my conversation, his solace ; my accomplishments, his delight !

“ Time wore away the memory of his Princess, and increased his *fatal* attachment to me. The Prince was in his thirty-second year ; captivating in person, and amiable in manners. As he had lived upon the very

best terms with the relations of his deceased wife, who was allied to the most illustrious families in Spain, decency and respect towards *them* prevented his avowing his partiality for *me*. His addresses, I conceived, were honourable ; and his passion was not unpleasing to me.—I felt a strong prepossession in his favour. His exemplary kindness towards his former Princess ; his affectionate attention to his son, who was then only six years old ; his acknowledged public character for benevolence and generosity, added to the most brilliant talents, cultivated by all the graces of education, were powerful advocates in his favour. My heart was a stranger to deceit ; and the purity of its sentiments placed it far above the meanness of suspicion.—I considered the Prince as my friend,

and my protector: he availed himself of those confidential titles to cover the blackest purposes; and under the mask of friendship obtained my esteem—esteem ripened into affection.—He marked the weakness of my soul, and triumphed over that *honour* he was bound to protect, by all the laws of truth and hospitality.”

An involuntary groan burst from the heart of Elvira; she clasped her trembling hands in the agony of affliction, and pressing them to her forehead, concealed the pearly drop that hung upon her eye-lid.

“Sweet Elvira,” said Carline, “be comforted: your sorrows make you doubly dear to every sympathizing heart.”

Elvira rested her head upon the shoulder of her friend ; and the Marchioness continued the dreadful history.

“ In vain did I remonstrate with the destroyer of my peace, dreading my brother’s vengeance, and convinced that he would never pardon the affront offered to his family ; my timid bosom tamely consented to conceal its anguish, and patiently endured the miseries of despair, heightened by the deep wounds of insult and neglect.

“ The awful moment of my brother’s return, now approached. My heart dreaded to meet him, though every vein panted for his protection.

“ He arrived——and his *first* em-

brace was bestowed upon the betrayer of his *sister*!

“He pressed him to his bosom, with the warmth of a fond father.

“I return,” said he, “from the perils of the field, to thank my Prince for the care with which he has preserved the most valued treasure I possess.—I am indeed indebted to you for your generous protection of my beloved Madeline, and now receive her from your hands with more delight than I could experience from the proudest gift the world could bestow! Then turning towards me, while rapture beamed in his benignant eyes—“My sweet Madeline,” said he, “the sight of you makes me smile at the recollection of the dangers I have encountered!

Blest in your society, the turmoils of a camp will soon be forgotten.

“To-morrow we will depart for the castle, where you shall preside the mistress of my fortune, the honour of my family. Your virtues will gild the gloom of solitude, and your conversation harmonize my mind, troubled by the tumults and vicissitudes to which it has been lately accustomed.

“We departed. The Prince Almanza, with the poisoned tongue of deep dissimulation, bade me—FAREWELL!—The sound will never cease to vibrate on my heart strings, until they break with the mournful repetition!

“The Prince was esteemed as a

man of such unsullied honour, that the contaminating breath of calumny had never dared assail him! He veiled hypocrisy in the simple garb of meek humility! The adulation of mean and sordid minds fed his insatiable vanity, while he dazzled their deluded eyes with the splendour of his accomplishments! He was the *most* dangerous of men, because the *least* suspected! He availed himself of his public reputation, for the practice of every private folly; and, under the smiling mask of complacency, tyrannized over the weak minds of those who were wretched enough to be his dependants. His court was crowded by servile sycophants, who had the temerity to blazon his pretended virtues, without the courage to condemn his vices!

“ Such was the Prince Almanza : may the virtues of his infant son expunge from the historic page the baseness of his father !

“ At the expiration of a few short weeks, my last state of dreadful humiliation became visible to the fond eyes of my afflicted brother ; I *then* confessed a crime, which it was no longer in my *power* to conceal.—I embraced his knees, and, in the anguish of my soul, implored him to seek an asylum for me until the tremendous hour was past, when even the most criminal demand the sigh of pity : I promised that the remainder of my days should be dedicated to penitence and humility. I assured him, that the author of my dishonour was far beyond the reach of vengeance, or the possibility of my

ever beholding him again! Then, bathing his hand with agonizing tears, conjured him not to extort the fatal secret from me, for I had made a solemn, sacred vow, never to disclose his name, until his last prayer had sealed his peace with Heaven!

“ My brother raised me from the earth—he pressed me to his bosom. I felt his generous heart struggling under the conflicts of pity and resentment.

“ He provided a place of retirement for me ; I withdrew from the forest of Vancenza to a small house in the neighbourhood of Madrid, where I passed for the widow of an officer.

“ My Elvira, as soon as she was born, was conveyed to the castle by an old female, who was a stranger to my name and family. I told her, that the Count Vancenza had been the dearest friend of my lost husband, and, in remembrance of his virtues, he had promised to provide for his unfortunate offspring.

“ My little darling was considered by the domestics, as a fatherless, dependant on the bounty of their Lord ; and, as soon as my strength permitted, I returned to Vancenza, where I now write this painful history of my unequalled and hopeless sorrows. I shall deliver the key of this sacred deposit to my brother's care, for my Elvira, though he is a stranger to the meaning of the gift.

“ To my adored child I leave the last fond precepts of a mother’s heart:—I conjure her to remember the fatal snare that betrayed the spotless honour of her parent ; and to avoid the insidious serpent, that lurks beneath the specious veil of flattery. Blessed offspring of sorrow ! dear picture of the hapless being who gave her existence ! may the guardian angel, whose task it is to protect the unsuspecting and the innocent, still hover over her with unceasing vigilance, and present eternally before her sight the dangers and deceptions of a world, where virtue struggles midst a maze of snares, wove by the cunning hand of dark duplicity. I counsel her to let meekness and humility preside over all her actions ;—to cherish in her bosom the sentiments of pity and

forgiveness; to remember that she has *lost* her *only* natural protector, and must, by exercising the virtues of her heart, endeavour to command the affections of the discerning and honourable part of mankind. All my property, which consists only of my family jewels, I leave to my brother, in trust for my Elvira: they are the *trifling* and *childish* appendages of rank; and she will give them additional value, by considering them as such.

“ I have embraced my cherubim; I have bathed her with my tears—a *mother's* tears!—Alas! she has no *father*—no *kindred* that will acknowledge her!

“ I feel that I am journeying fast towards that home, where alone I can

expect to find repose and consolation! If this manuscript should ever reach the hands of my beloved child, let her not lament, that the *last* pang wrung from my withered heart has expiated its errors! Her delicacy will have nothing to apprehend from the destroyer of her mother—for he no longer *exists* to discover her origin---

* * * * *

From the date of the manuscript, it appeared to have been written only three weeks before the Marchioness, who was then at Naples, received the dreadful intelligence of her sister's death. When she arrived at Vancenza, the little Elvira was nearly two years old, and her unfortunate mother had then been dead some months---any recollection of having seen her, was therefore impossible.

The secret could not transpire through any of the domestics ; for Elvira had never been considered as the daughter of the Countess Madeline—and the Count Vancenza was too generous and too proud to betray the trust reposed in him.

CHAPTER XI.

By the time the Marchioness had concluded the fatal manuscript, the glimpse of day faintly shone through the casement of her chamber ; the birds began to twitter upon the battlements of the castle, and the footsteps of the domestics, who were risen to commence their household occupations, reminded them of the hour.

“ Let us retire to rest,” said the Marchioness ; “ and when we rise, we will consider what is to be done upon this painful subject. Look up,

my beloved Elvira, you shall find in *me*, a mother ; your gentle mind must not feel too sensibly impressed with this new calamity.

Elvira sighed deeply.

The Marchioness embraced her tenderly ; “ take courage ” said she, “ my sweet girl—virtue cannot long smart beneath the scourge of Heaven. These afflictions are only trials of your patience ; and it is the duty of weak mortals to submit without repining.”

Carline wept over the unhappy orphan ; whose grief was far, very far beyond the power of complaining !

Her fixed eye had no longer a single tear to quench the burning

anguish of her brain ; her trembling knees could scarcely support her languid form ; she pressed the hands of her dear relatives ; and left the chamber without uttering a syllable.

She passed through the great hall, bedecked with all the splendid preparations of nuptial celebration—her heart shuddered at the sight.

On the stair-case she was met by the old Steward, who, observing her already drest, and feebly ascending, wan, exhausted, and scarcely able to crawl along : “ Sweet Lady,” cried the faithful servant, “ what afflicts you ? Shall I awaken the Marchioness ? You look deadly pale ! Has any thing affrighted you ? Shall

"I assist you?" He advanced towards her---she fainted in his arms.——

He alarmed the family ; every face was beclouded with dark sorrow !

She was conveyed to her bed by two female servants ; who, with the Marchioness, attended by her daughter, sat by her side in the most dreadful state of affliction.

She remained the whole day totally insensible ; uttering incoherent sentences, and execrating the name of ALMANZA !

In the evening, Carline, who never quitted Elvira's chamber, approaching the window, opened the curtains. The landscape was glow-

ing with the red lustre of the setting sun! All was lovely! all was animation! The court-yard was decorated with garlands;---the lofty turrets glistened with ruby light---it was the sublimest picture of luxuriant nature. She turned with disgust from its beauties; but what was the contrast the chamber presented? Dark, gloomy, silent, mournful; a cell of sorrow; and a bed of death!

Dreading that her agitation might disturb Elvira, she retired to the window of an adjoining apartment.

In a few minutes she discovered two horsemen in the Prince's livery advancing along the avenue.

They seemed to fly upon the wings

of joy ! their eager haste proclaimed them the harbingers of bliss ! But, alas ! the dawn of happiness was overcast with darkness, and the keen blast of dire distraction had withered all the buds of social comfort.

The Marchioness descended to the great hall, where, with an aching heart, she waited to receive the promised bridegroom.

He arrived ; the gates were open ; he entered, with an air of conscious triumph ! He leaped from his horse with that exulting alacrity, which denotes the joyful expectation of a rapturous welcome !

He ran towards the Marchioness, and falling on his knee—" I am come," said he, " to claim my pre-

cious treasure---my bride---my darling---my Elvira!"

"Amiable Almanza," replied the Marchioness, "I fear Elvira *never* can be yours :-----a sudden fever has attacked her precious senses-----she lies upon the bed of sickness---there are no *hopes* of her recovery."

The Prince shrunk like a blasted flower that meets the fervid lightning!

He conjured the Marchioness by all the miseries he felt, by all the virtues of Elvira, by every vow of plighted faith between them, to lead him to her. "I *must*, I *will* behold her," said the Prince.——

He was conducted to the melancholy chamber. Carline met him at the door----she shook her head---and whispered---"*All will soon be over!*"

He approached the bed ; the curtains were undrawn ; she lay as if in a profound sleep ; her cheek was white, and cold as Alpine snow ; her dark eye-brows, shading the fainting orbs beneath, were agitated by quick convulsive motions ; her breath was short and laboured ; her hand was feverish ; she was totally insensible.

The Prince listened as she breathed ; a crystal drop stole down her cheek ; he kissed it off ; she murmured---“ ABHORRED ALMANZA !”

He seized her burning hand ; she drew it hastily away, and exclaimed, with a deep sigh, “ *I cannot wed my BROTHER !*”

The Prince imagined these expressions were merely the effects of her delirium ; he addressed her in the tenderest accents---“ Beauteous Elvira,”

said he, "look up, behold your lover, your husband, your *own* Almanza."

At the sound of his voice she started up, and gazing on him with a momentary horror, she hid her face upon her pillow.

The Marchioness beckoned the Prince, and intreated him to withdraw, judging it most prudent that he should leave Elvira, at least for that evening.

He obeyed ; the midnight hour was passed in grief and watching.

The Marchioness retired to her chamber, almost fainting with fatigue: Elvira seemed more composed—and, in a low voice, bade her *good night*.

Carline, and an old female servant, sat by the side of the bed.

The clock struck THREE ;---Elvira counted the strokes—*for the last time !*

A small lamp stood upon the table ; its glimmering rays just cast a feeble light through the opening of the curtains.

All was silent for some minutes.---

Elvira groaned deeply.---“ Hark !” said she, “ I hear the sound of ten thousand harps, they are borne by troops of angels ! See ! they throng about a glittering vision ! It is my mother---she beckons me to her embrace---I come——

She made an effort to rise-----her strength failed---*she sunk into the arms of DEATH !*

So drooped, so withered, THE ROSE OF VANCENZA !!

Carline's shrieks awoke the Marchioness ; all was frenzy and despair ! The apartments were stripped of their gaudy trappings ; the great hall was hung with black, to receive the *remains* of Elvira.

At the end of eight days, the last sad obsequies were performed in the church of Saint Isidro ; the corpse of the *once* beautiful Elvira was deposited, to mingle its ashes with those of the lamented Vancenza !

Almanza attended as *chief mourner* !

The disconsolate Marchioness, shortly after, retired to Italy, and dedicated the remainder of her days to solitude and resignation. Carline, at the death of her mother, which happened about ten years after, embraced a state of celibacy, in a convent of grey sisters near Naples.

The unfortunate and virtuous Almanza, who was never acquainted with the cause of the dreadful catastrophe, after passing a year of total seclusion, devoted the rest of his life to the duties of a soldier. The image of Elvira never departed from his memory, even for a moment: after many years of unsullied glory, he quitted this toilsome pilgrimage of sorrow, to unite with her——FOR EVER!

The mournful manuscript, was, by the Marchioness de Vallorie, after erasing the family name, deposited in the library of the University at Naples ; where possibly it remains, a *sad record* of the fatal consequences of——MISTAKEN CREDULITY !

FINIS.